

Reality Theatre
Main Street
Robertsdale
Huntingdon County
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-5557

HABS
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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
Reality Theatre

HABS No. PA-5557

Location: Main Street and Route 913, Robertsdale, Huntingdon County, Pa.

History and Description: In 1918 the coal company constructed a theater in Robertsdale, at the intersection of Main Street and Route 913. The Liberty Theater was a large, wood-frame structure that measured approximately 40' x 110', with a seating capacity of 425. According to a local newspaper, "The Liberty Theatre was very popular with the theatre folks of the Broad Top region. The latest and the best of talking pictures were shown nightly on the screen, and the theatre was liberally patronized." On December 11, 1936, it was destroyed by a fire of "undetermined origin."

The coal company chose not to rebuild, and in 1948 they sold the property to Gene Yanni, a former miner who had been paralyzed in a mining accident nineteen years earlier. Yanni and his brother-in-law, Thomas Cupillari, financed the construction of a new theater that same year. The new Reality Theater was built of concrete blocks with a brick-clad street facade that incorporated an arched parapet and bull's-eye window, keystone motifs in the window surrounds, glass-block details, and a wood marquis with lights. Yanni explained how the Reality Theater got its name: "People thought it only a dream for the reopening of another theatre in Robertsdale. But in 1948, the dream became a reality when we opened the theatre--a dream come true, the Reality Theatre, that is." The theater opened on December 23, 1948, and operated until August 11, 1958. The theater reopened in 1968, and operated again until the early 1980s. The building, which remains one of the village's architectural highlights, is currently for sale.

Project Information and Sources: This report was part of a larger project to document the Rockhill Iron and Coal Company towns of Robertsdale and Woodvale in Huntingdon County, Pennsylvania. The project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER), Robert Kapsch, chief, at the request of America's Industrial Heritage Project (AIHP). For an overview history of the towns that provides the significance and context for this building as well as a comprehensive list of sources see HABS Nos. PA-5553, PA-5484, and PA-5485. See also additional HABS reports on buildings in each town.

Project historian Lola Bennett completed the research and writing for this project during summer 1989 under the direction of Alison K. Hoagland, senior HABS historian. Bennett's work was published as The Company Towns of the Rockhill Iron and Coal Company: Robertsdale and Woodvale, Pennsylvania (Washington, D.C.: HABS/HAER, National Park Service, 1990). Illustrations in the publication include 35mm photographs taken by Bennett; large-format photographs taken by HAER photographer Jet Lowe; and historic photographs from the collections of Thomas L. Matthews, Kenneth Morgan, Ron Morgan, and the Huntingdon County Historical Society. The publication was compiled and edited by HABS historians Kim E. Wallace and Sara Amy Leach. Contemporary 35mm and historic photographs used in the publication as well as other miscellaneous research materials were transmitted to the AIHP collection at Stapleton Library, Indiana University of Pennsylvania, Indiana, Pa.